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17 November 2011

Mrs Murley
Headteacher
Balksbury Junior School
Floral Way
Salisbury Road
Andover
Hampshire
SP10 3QP

Dear Mrs Murley

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Balksbury Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 November 2011 with Andrew Watters HMI, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in July 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good progress

Newly Qualified Teachers may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2010

- Raise attainment across the school so that a very large majority of pupils make good or better progress each academic year, through:
 - improving the quality of teaching so that 80% of it is good or better, particularly with reference to pace and challenge and providing clearer direction to pupils on how to improve their work
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to talk about, use and apply their skills, knowledge and understanding.

- Increase the effectiveness of the school's leaders and the governing body in driving school improvement by ensuring:
 - self-evaluation is more frequent, rigorous and realistic
 - that the school development plan gives a clear sense of direction, identifies exactly what steps are to be taken and has identified points at which the impact can be measured
 - that the governing body plays an active role in challenging the school regarding pupils' outcomes and routinely evaluates its policies, the quality of teaching is monitored more rigorously and frequently, and that staff training is targeted on the precise improvement areas.

Special measures: monitoring of Balksbury Junior School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 November 2011

Evidence

The lead HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and data, and undertook eight lesson observations, most of which were conducted alongside a senior member for staff. The HMI also held meetings with: senior and middle leaders; one of the newly qualified teachers; a group of parents and carers; a group of pupils; the District Manager and Primary Phase Inspector from the local authority; and the Chair of the Governing Body and three members of the governing body.

Context

The headteacher took up her post officially as the headteacher of the federated Balksbury Infant and Junior schools in September 2011. Since the previous monitoring inspection, four governors have been appointed to replace those that left. Four new members of staff have joined the school, two of which are newly qualified teachers.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Pupils' levels of attainment at the end of Year 6 in 2011 rose and were broadly average. However, these pupils still underachieved given their starting points, and too few attained the higher Level 5 in English and mathematics. Pupils made greater gains in English than they did in mathematics, but, lower and middle ability girls did not achieve as well as the boys.

Since September 2011, the rate of progress made by the large majority of pupils has accelerated. Pupils are making at least expected progress, even though this remains a little uneven across the school. Those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals are progressing as well as their peers. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are now making more consistent and better progress due to the improved quality of support they receive. Pupils' ability to use and apply their mathematical skills is developing well. Good examples were observed in all the Year 6 classes, with pupils undertaking investigative, practical activities to work out the perimeter of shapes and the area of the different parts of coloured flags. Pupils' ability to construct complex sentences is also improving throughout the school. Good examples were seen in pupils' descriptive writing in Year 3 and in work about the Blitz in Year 5.

Judgement

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise attainment across the school so that a very large majority of pupils make good or better progress each academic year – good

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The good behaviour of pupils contributes to them feeling safe in school. Pupils told the inspector that the behaviour when they go swimming has improved. Some pupils would welcome a quiet sheltered area where they can play games, such as board games. Pupils appreciate the access to healthy snacks at break time and the tasty and healthy cooked meals provided by the school.

The good links with the community, which includes other schools and the local church, are making an effective contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development. Levels of attendance remain above average and are rising. As pupils' basic skills become more secure this is improving the extent to which they are prepared for the future.

The effectiveness of provision

Teachers have benefited from opportunities of observing good practice. The quality of teaching is now more securely satisfactory with an increasing proportion that is good; however, a few weaknesses remain. Teaching typically promotes active learning with pupils working collaboratively and using checklists to help them to improve their work. Teachers enrich pupils' vocabulary and nearly all learning is now put into a meaningful context. Lessons are not always equally engaging for girls as they are for boys, particularly in mathematics. There is much better use of assessment strategies during lessons. However, these are still not used after the introductory part of some lessons or to identify when pupils are ready to be challenged further. At times this slows the rate of progress that pupils make, particularly the more able. Pupils told the inspector that, although much improved, some teachers still keep them on the carpet for too long, or spend too much time talking. As a result, they are not always provided with sufficient time to complete their work. All pupils have targets to help them with their writing and mathematics, but not necessarily for reading. Furthermore, not all pupils understand the full meaning of their targets. Pupils say they appreciate their teachers' marking, but that in a small minority of cases, feedback is not always given to them quickly enough. Pupils are expected to check their work to see if they can identify for themselves how they can make it better. However, they are not all provided with sufficient opportunities to reflect on their teachers' helpful comments in order to make best use of the guidance to improve their work.

The overall quality of planning has improved, particularly for mathematics. However, the quality of planning for English is variable. Furthermore, where lessons include

cross-curricular links, the planning does not always specify clearly enough the progression of skills in each of the different subjects being covered.

Learning support assistants have benefited from being observed, receiving feedback and additional training. This has enabled them to become more effective in supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior and middle leaders are developing their roles well and are working more effectively as a team. This is helping to drive and embed improvements throughout the school at an accelerated pace, and is also leading to a reduction in the attainment gap between girls and boys. The deputy headteacher provides the headteacher with good support, especially in the rigorous analysis of data to track the progress made by pertinent groups of pupils. This information is used effectively by senior leaders to identify and target underachievement. However, it has yet to be used equally well by middle leaders and teachers to ensure that all planning is sharply focused on pupils' needs. There is now a formal cycle of self-evaluation, with clear timescales. Senior as well as middle leaders are producing evaluations about their areas of responsibility, which is helping them to prioritise the subsequent improvements needed. This has led for example, to better provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, evaluations do not all report rigorously enough on the outcomes for different groups of pupils. Action plans reflect the school's main priorities; despite the improved quality of these documents, they do not all include enough interim milestones against which progress can be measured.

The progress made by the governing body has been at a slower pace than that made by the rest of the school. Arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff are secure, and members of the governing body have become more high profile in the school by visiting more often, for instance meeting with curriculum leaders. There is more rigorous and frequent monitoring of the quality of teaching and subject leaders appreciate the support and challenge provided by their link governor. However, members of the governing body have not monitored or evaluated the impact of the school's policy on equality of opportunity and the school's accessibility plan has not been reviewed. Although there is evidence of increased challenge about pupils' outcomes this is still not rigorous enough and does not focus sharply on the progress being made by different groups of pupils. The federation is contributing well to the school's efforts to build capacity to improve. A good example is in the appropriate level of support provided to the newly qualified teachers by the mentor who is based in the infant school.

Parents and carers told the inspector how pleased they are with the school and the improved progress their children are making. They expressed a high level of confidence in the school's ability to keep their children safe and value the

information they receive about how well their children are doing. They are particularly appreciative of the good levels of communication between home and school. Parents and carers believe the school takes good account of their views; this led, for example, to the improvements made to the feedback their children receive about homework.

Judgement

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Increase the effectiveness of the school's leaders and the governing body in driving school improvement – good

External support

The quality and impact of the support provided by local authority officers have been good and embraced by all staff. Senior as well as middle leaders have benefited from the coaching and guidance they have received about how to improve the quality of teaching and learning. There has been a significant reduction in the level of external support provided by the local authority as a result of key leaders' ability to help bring about improvement.